10: Viski E-4, 5 (no date) 1932 EC1 Hungary EC1

443 from all over the country and the last heralds of some ancient profession can be seen at these gatherings. Such is the market on the ourtskirts of the town of Debrecen, which is called the «Freedom of the Hortobágy». Here we meet especially interesting characters of the great ancient Hungarian profession: pasturing. We can enjoy the kaleidoscopic vision of a great cattle market. It is staged on the ancient pasture, around us is endless plain, above us the sky, limitless like the sea, with the enticing waters of a Fata Morgana shimmering on the horizon...

Initiation of young men and the forming of long lasting friendships

• 881 Certain details in the initiation of young men remind one of guild customs. It is by no means impossible that the young peasants borrowed a few customs from the guilds. Certain things they imitated externally, and they also put their own «laws» into writing, in one place as early as 1702. These «laws» deal primarily with the obedience due to the leader of the young men, the «arbiter of the village», and with the rules of good manners. The strict rules of the guilds also extend to such matters, but their primary object is to guard themselves against bunglers, to further their own interests and to examine the knowledge of the person up for initiation. The society of farming lads has no such aims. Their initiation means no more than the recognition that someone has grown up; the appreciation of the fact that the boy has become a young man and that from then onwards he has a right to visit girls, take part in dances and have a share in all those things which are traditionally due

to a lad. It is quite obvious that the initiation of lads is merely the admission of their maturity. 881

The leader of the lads is an elected arbiter, who sees to it that the laws are observed. He conducts the initiation. Two lieutenants, a «master of the wine» and one «of the dance» are his attendants. It is the duty of the two lieutenants to invite the girls, to drive them to the site of the entertainment and back home after it. They are also responsible for the wine and the dancing.

Naturally the permission of the parents is also needed for the initiation of a lad. The initiation itself is performed with the «lad's belt» under the «lads' coat of arms». The «lad's belt» is handed down from generation to generation and is preserved with enormous care. The «lads' coat of arms» is a reaping wreath: it is woven from wheat, rye and oat ears and bound round with many bright ribbons. It hangs from the ceiling of the initiation room, which is usually the village inn or its dancing place. In some villages the local blacksmith forges the «coat of arms» from iron, in the shape of a crown. Onto this they hang the symbols of farming, — naturally made of iron — tiny sickles, scythes, pitchforks, rakes; if the village goes in for fishing as well, then a boat is added to all these. The bright ribbons are not missing either. At the initiation ceremony those to be initiated stand on a bench, so that the «coat of arms» is just over their heads. The ceremony is very solemn, often there is a large gathering to watch it. The arbiter greets the village, the lads and the public present. After each little toast, he drinks a glass of wine according to prescribed rules, and so do the lads up for initiation. In one part of the country the initiation is always arranged on the morrow of a dance, and it is also followed by a dance. First there is a round dance, at the end of which a lad and a girl form a gate with raised arms, and all the others pass through it in

881 a long chain. After this there is ordinary dancing. In some districts the initiation is not as solemn as all this, and its date is always Childermas Day, that is the 28th of December. The lads first make the round of the girls' houses according to custom, and beat the maidens with willow whips. As a sign of gratitude, each beaten girl ties a ribbon one yard long to the whip. Finally the whip, with last year's ribbons on it, is tied onto the hoop of the coat of arms, and the new ribbons are hung on it too ! — This custom shows even more plainly the essence of the initiation of lads : the recognition of maturity is coupled with the beating of girls, the latter meaning the conjuring up of fertility. The whip, which is supposed to cause fertility, is united with the «lads' coat of arms».

This variation of the initiation of lads is still practiced in the Csallóköz and the Szigetköz, the districts of the Upper Danube.

In some places there exists a custom amongst the girls which is a little like the initiation. It is called «komálás» or «komaság». It usually occurs on the Sunday after Easter, for which reason this is called the «komáló» Sunday. «Koma» means in Hungarian friend, pal ; «komálás» is really the making of friends. The «komáló» girls send or bring each other «koma» plates, or in the dialect of another district «mátka» plates. The «koma» plate contains wine, two painted eggs, a cracknel : it is covered with a white napkin. In some villages they hand it to each other with a little verse :

I received a «koma» plate,
I covered it with gold,
A friend sends it to a friend,
The friend shall exchange it for friendship.

The «komaság» or «mátkaság» means a friendship lasting until the grave. «Friends, friends, let us be friends, for a hundred years and for ever !»

527 As it is now in this game, so is it with real kings in
883 the case of primitive people, and so was it probably with the ancient Hungarian leaders. The king was sent asleep, but into eternal sleep, as perhaps the Hungarians did with their leader Almos, who led them as far as this country. Almos in Hungarian means «sleepy». According to simple people death is only a kind of sleep; children have the same notion.

[773] The Hungarian peasant explains the election of the Whitsun king as «. . . the imitation of an old custom. Once upon a time the councillors of the country elected every year a new king on Whitsun's day; he was usually a shepherd boy. They gave him a sleeping draught, and they were wont to seat him on the throne in an unconscious state. But his power only lasted until the following Whitsun. Then he was put asleep in the same way and was sent back to his old place.»

In the case of many of the more primitive peoples real kingship is more or less a Whitsun kingdom — passing glory. It does not last until the king's life is over, in fact it ends when the people so decide, or when the king is conquered. Then he is set aside and a stronger man takes his place.

• [881] A few of the old customs in use for the initiation of adolescents have found their way into the custom of Whitsun's kingdom. We have already referred to the fact that in one variation of the game a bridgeroom appears beside the queen, and that one ancient Hungarian royal marriage has also been mixed up in it.

883 Serious ancient customs or habits are thus turned in
657 the course of time into childish games, bearing faint marks
527 of old memories. A thousand years ago the Hungarians brought terrifying new war tactics into Europe, and pious Western friars added to their prayers: «From the arrows